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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 002839

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: REDRAWING THE LINES: THE STRUGGLE OVER NEW
ELECTORAL DISTRICTS BEGINS

REF: A. 2004 TAIPEI 2662

[B](#). TAIPEI 2066

[C](#). TAIPEI 2337

[D](#). TAIPEI 2490

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D).

[1](#). (U) Summary: On June 7, Taiwan's ad hoc National Assembly approved a constitutional revision package which, as part of a broad package of reforms, will reduce the number of representatives from 225 to 113, and will increase the number of legislative districts from 29 to 73. The debate has just begun over the politically sensitive issue of who will demarcate the new electoral districts and what methodology will be used to redraw them. In the coming months, these issues will be hotly contested, both among and within Taiwan's political parties. End Summary.

[2](#). (U) Under Taiwan's present "multiple representative per district" system, 225 representatives were elected to the Legislative Yuan (LY) from 29 districts. Under the new "single representative per district" system, only 113 representatives will be elected: 73 from geographic districts, 6 from "mountain and plains aborigine" constituencies, and an additional 34 at-large seats to be assigned according to proportional voting for political parties. The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) is currently responsible for redrawing electoral districts. The CEC was created by executive order in the 1980's, its members are all selected by the president, and its decisions are not subject to oversight or control by the LY. For these reasons, Pan-Blue leaders challenge the CEC's impartiality and allege it would "gerrymander" districts to favor the DPP. In its place, KMT and PFP leaders urge either the creation of an independent redistricting commission, whose decisions would be subject to LY approval, or the creation of a new CEC under new regulations determined by the LY. Pan-Green supporters counter that any plan requiring LY approval would unfairly advantage Pan-Blue parties, which hold a slender majority of the LY.

KMT Wants a New CEC

[3](#). (U) Challenging the impartiality of the existing CEC, KMT Central Policy Committee Executive Director Tseng Yung-chuan publicly called for reorganizing the CEC based on an "organic law" by the LY rather than on presidential decree. This would enable the LY rather than the president to select the CEC's members and proscribe its procedures. Tseng announced that the KMT will send a bill to the LY for consideration at the opening of the next session in September.

PFP Not Willing to Budge

[4](#). (C) PFP legislator Vincent Chang (Hsien-yao), Director of the PFP Central Policy Committee and close confidant of PFP Chairman James Soong, told AIT, in a bit of histrionics, that the outcome of the legislative redistricting battle would not only determine the 2008 presidential election, but would also decide the future security of Taiwan and the surrounding region. (Note: Earlier this spring, Chang, with similar histrionics, told AIT that National Assembly passage of the constitutional reform package, which occurred on June 7, would send cross-Strait relations into a crisis. End note.) Chang further opined that LY redistricting in favor the DPP would of set the stage for Taiwan to elect a President in 2008 who would move more actively toward independence, before the PRC's growing strength renders independence impossible. This would, in turn, provoke a military response from China that Hu Jintao would not be able to prevent. On the other hand, Chang argued, should the KMT retake the presidency, cross-Strait relations would relax considerably. (Note: Since the LY and presidential election dates are likely to be adjusted to occur simultaneously, the possibility that an unfavorable LY election outcome would somehow adversely affect the result of a subsequent presidential election is substantially reduced. End note.)

15. (C) Chang alleged numerous examples of pro-DPP bias by the CEC, stating flatly that KMT and PFP would reject any redistricting plan crafted by the CEC in its current incarnation. Citing "mutual mistrust" between the DPP and KMT as "Taiwan's most serious political problem," Chang told AIT that PFP and KMT would insist on putting any redistricting proposal to an LY vote. He noted that he had proposed to PFP leadership the formation of a special redistricting committee, composed of experts chosen by the LY, whose proposals would be subject to a simple up-or-down vote by the entire LY -- no modifications permitted. Chang acknowledged, however, that Pan-Green supporters would probably reject any redistricting plan deemed acceptable to the Pan-Blue-controlled LY.

TSU Seeks a Middle Road

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16. (C) Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) legislator Huang Shi-cho, Vice-Chairman of the party's LY caucus, is the only member of the TSU to sit on the LY Internal Affairs Committee, the committee which will likely debate the LY response to the redistricting question. Huang told AIT that the current CEC is beholden to President Chen and the DPP, and would be unable to remain impartial in delineating new electoral districts. In its place, Huang has proposed to TSU leadership the formation of a "Selection Committee" of 20 LY members, five from each of the four major parties that would, in turn, select members of an LY "Redistricting Committee." Huang told AIT that the TSU would insist on the Redistricting Committee decisions as final, and not subject to review or approval by the LY. (Note: Huang's remarks to AIT conflict with public statements made by other TSU members, who had insisted on LY approval.)

DPP Not Worried at All

17. (C) Wu Hsiang-jung, Deputy Director of the DPP Central Policy Committee and Director of DPP polling activities, told AIT that DPP leaders are not concerned about the "gerrymandering" issue, and attribute the recent furor to political grandstanding. Taiwan's redistricting laws and traditions, Wu explained, require that electoral district boundaries follow city, county, and other administrative boundaries to the extent possible. He believes the LY Pan-Blue leadership will not dare risk the almost-certain media and public backlash that would follow a naked attempt to redraw electoral boundaries along political lines. The DPP is not opposed to side-stepping the CEC in favor of a special redistricting committee, but is against submitting that committee's decisions to the LY for approval in order to prevent any politically-motivated tampering. (Note: Several DPP leaders have told AIT that they are confident about the long-term Taiwanization of Taiwan society and politics, which should work to the DPP's advantage. This confidence might in part explain the DPP leadership's lack of concern regarding redistricting. End Note.)

Comment

18. (C) As DPP legislator Lee Wen-chung told AIT, the new 113-member LY system, by assigning five seats to Taiwan's aboriginal populations, and one seat each to under-populated, but solidly Blue Hualien, Kinmen, Matsu, Taitung, and Penghu, effectively gives the Pan-Blue opposition an automatic ten-seat advantage in the LY. By the DPP's reckoning, it will need to secure 58 percent of the total vote to obtain parity. Thus, it would seem the Pan-Blue alarms over potential gerrymandering are motivated more by the desire to score political points against President Chen and his alleged cronyism than by genuine concern over systemic unfairness.

19. (C) The redistricting debate will play out in the same fractious political environment which enabled the PFP to bring the National Assembly process to a standstill. Under the LY's "Party Consensus" rule, legislation cannot move forward unless all four party caucuses agree. Although Pan-Green and Pan-Blue leaders say they understand the need for impartiality, and all say they are willing to bypass the presidentially-appointed CEC in favor of a new, more representative redistricting body, the PFP and KMT are unlikely to waive the advantage of their LY majority, and may insist on a final LY vote on any redistricting plan. Of course, the Pan-Greens will probably balk at giving the Pan-Blue-controlled LY the last word. The June 27 LY Legal Bureau report raised the possibility of cooperation -- it recommended the LY create a new redistricting subcommittee, independent of the CEC, comprised of impartial decisionmakers, but it also recommended that the subcommittee's redistricting plans be subject to LY approval before implementation. (Note: The LY legal bureau is composed of civil servants, not legislators. End note.)

Although it is still early in the game, equitable redistricting efforts could be stymied in any number of ways: the Pan-Blues could try to use their LY majority to force through a plan unacceptable to the Green; the PFP (or DPP) could use the Party Consensus rule to halt the process; or, in some unanticipated way, mutual suspicions could rule out compromise altogether, as it has thus far with the Special Defense Budget bill. Most probably, the LY will postpone dealing with the issue until the last moment, then cobble together a compromise, as they did in May in passing guidelines for the National Assembly.

10. (C) Taiwan has no binding law determining how electoral districts must be drawn, and there are several competing versions for who should decide, and how. But as often is the case in Taiwan, politics (and tradition) may trump the law, whatever it may be. Taiwan's electoral districts have always been drawn along county and city lines, and local populations and the media will likely reject any redistricting plan that violates traditional notions of regional or social identity. More importantly, voters will likely punish at the polls any party caught trying to manipulate redistricting for selfish political ends. Although it is still very early in the redistricting game, perhaps the most important check on the gerrymandering impulse will be social, and not legal. End Comment.

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